



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

June 17, 2002

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
111 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-4704

Dear Senator Murray:

In December 1999, the Centers for Disease Control published a list of the top ten public health achievements of the 20th century. Not surprisingly, public vaccination programs were at the top of that list. It is largely because of these cost-effective immunization programs that only influenza and pneumonia, among all communicable diseases, now rank among the top ten killers.

I am writing to you on behalf of the entire Washington State Board of Health because the system for producing vaccines in this country is in crisis. We produce 11 vaccines for children. In the past year, there were manufacturing problems for 10 of those, and supply shortages for eight. Shortages of the vaccine DTaP reached the point that, despite a recent announcement that the supply is being restored, children entering school this fall may not be able to meet the Board's rule-based standard for full immunization. To deal with this problem, the Board found it necessary to adopt an emergency rule at its June 12, 2002 meeting to modify vaccination requirements. Under the amended rule, children who defer a scheduled immunization because of a shortage may attend on conditional status, but must become fully immunized within 60 days after the shortage ends.

This was a painful action for the Board. Mandatory immunizations at school-entry do more than protect individuals. By raising immunization rates, they help eliminate disease reservoirs and make it harder for communicable diseases to move through a population. The Board realizes that deferring immunizations may send a confusing message—that childhood vaccines are important enough to mandate, but not so important that we can't choose to relax the mandates at times. We also know that when immunization rates drop during a shortage, they do not recover fully when the shortage ends. Systems that help people adhere to immunization schedules begin to break down—in providers' offices, in schools, in public health agencies, and in the home. Education efforts are compromised, and the public's trust can be undermined.

The Washington State Board of Health believes the pattern of vaccine shortages is doing serious damage to our nation's public health, damage that will take years to undo. Vaccination levels prior to these shortages were at record high levels and the diseases they prevent have become



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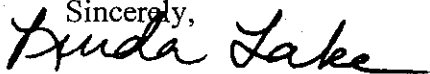
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extremely rare. We cannot afford to coast on our past achievements, however. If we allow these high levels of protection to drop, the return of these epidemic diseases is certain.

This is a national crisis that will require national solutions. Government's fundamental duty to protect the public health includes assurance of adequate supplies of essential vaccines. The private pharmaceutical companies entrusted with this task have failed repeatedly to produce adequate vaccine stocks. The Board therefore urges Congress to explore governmental solutions, such as creating a national vaccine stockpile or establishing federal vaccine manufacturing capabilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Lake". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Linda Lake, Chair  
Washington State Board of Health

cc: Washington State Board of Health Members

Ree Sailors

Maxine Hayes

Patty Hayes